

# THE SPECIAL EDGE

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PARTNERSHIPS FOR A  
UNIFIED SYSTEM OF EDUCATION:  
ACCOUNTABILITY

## Accountability in the Classroom

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### SPECIAL INSERTS

*Special Education Rights  
of  
Parents and Children*

Policymakers at all levels are setting higher expectations and standards for all students. This shift accompanies a push for greater accountability for what students are actually learning. Before the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), however, little or no achievement data had been collected on students with disabilities. And while policymakers continue to make decisions about practices and policies that affect all students based on the information gathered from these accountability efforts, until all students are assessed and included in these efforts, those decisions will be based on incomplete information. Educational opportunities for all students are diminished as a result.

### The challenge

Recent changes in IDEA require that children with disabilities participate in state and district assessment, with appropriate accommodations, if necessary. For educators, this challenge is huge. Real school improvement in accountability and assessment requires three assumptions:

- All students can learn.
- The learning progress of all students should be measured.
- Schools are responsible for measuring that progress.

Additionally, IDEA requires that by July 1, 2000, states must have in place an alternate assessment (see sidebar, page 6) for those students who are working on a curriculum designed for life skills. This typically involves the small percentage of students with significant cognitive disabilities who are not working toward a typical high school diploma.

### Accountability at every level

There are two basic types of accountability: one for systems and one for students. Currently, California is heavily invested in school accountability with its Academic Performance Indicators (APIs) based on SAT-9 testing. The results from this evaluation help to assign consequences for both low- and high-performing districts. But by 2004, when California has its high school exit exam in place, students will be held accountable for not passing. Clearly, tests are becoming the vehicle for academic rewards and sanctions for both schools and students.

### Justification for exclusion

Administrators or teachers have excluded students with disabilities from assessments for a variety of reasons. They may feel that the tests are too hard, that the curriculum reflected in the tests is different from what the student is learning, or that the student will become too frustrated

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*Informing and supporting parents, educators, and other service providers on special education topics, with a focus on research-based practices, legislation, technical support, and current resources*



## RiSE



*Dr. Alice Parker, Director of the Special Education Division of the California Department of Education*

## LETTER

## FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR

Families help us focus our efforts and keep us accountable. As we continue to implement the State Improvement Grant (SIG) over the next four years, the presence and contribution of families is central to how we build a unified system of education and how we help the existing local education agencies to reform and improve their teaching, and their early intervention and transition services. Our parallel partnerships with parents, educators, and key organizations establish the criteria that guide our ideas and our efforts.

Through the SIG, the Special Education Division has a five-year commitment to systematically improve relationships with parent-centered organizations, such as the seven Parent Training and Information Centers throughout California, the Family Resources Centers, and the Community Advisory Councils. We can already be proud of several accomplishments. Thanks to the resources provided by this grant and to the direction provided by parents, on-line trainings now exist for parents, as well as Parent Leadership trainings that are offered at various sites throughout the state. Regional Family Forums have met for a second consecutive year to allow us to learn from parents about the most important issues in special education that the state needs to address. Mini-grants have been available for a year now to support the presence of African-American and other underrepresented families at key, decision-making meetings.

The parents' forums this spring have provided our department with invaluable directives. Parents are asking the state and local education agencies for increased linguistic and cultural sensitivity; for improvement in the ways parents are informed of their rights and of the resources and programs that are available to them; for access to mentor parent programs so that they can learn from the experiences of others; for an increased opportunity to act as advocates for their children; for improved collaboration with existing education entities and stakeholders; for extensive (Individualized Education Plan) IEP training for all involved in the process; for integrated transition programs; for parental involvement in both the planning and the attendance of trainings for teachers; and for the insurance of special education rights for students involved in the juvenile court system. You can read the full text of these important recommendations on the Web at <http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/calstat/partnershipsinaction.html>.

These recommendations are extremely valuable directives, and I will work to implement each of them as we further define the most effective ways to secure quality special education programs in our schools. It is my expectation that the Partnership Committee on Special Education will use them as they continue to guide and direct the SIG. I will also bring the recommendations before the Advisory Commission on Special Education, knowing that the Commissioners are dedicated to actively fulfilling their role as advocates in the legislature and elsewhere for all important topics related to special education.

Parents know their children best. In the field of education, parents are a teacher's most valuable ally and partner. We at the Special Education Division are doing everything we can to create and foster this special and invaluable relationship. We need the voice of parents to keep us on track and pointed in the right direction.

# Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

## *Evaluating School Performance throughout California*

**T**he Special Education Division (SED) of the California Department of Education (CDE) is committed to positive student outcomes. It

believes in requiring a high level of accountability of all state and local efforts in educating the California students who receive special education services. The SED hopes to achieve this accountability by monitoring and supervising school districts for their compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA '97).

The SED holds high expectations for all students to meet the state standards. Consequently, its supervision and monitoring efforts focus on making sure that the procedures are in place (procedural safeguards) in each district for students to access their rightful services. It also seeks to ensure that the educational benefits required by IDEA '97 are in place. Using a data-informed system of accountability, it works to guide continuous improvement in all educational programs.

This is no small task, given the size of the state. California has over 1,066 school districts and in excess of six million students, with approximately 640,000 receiving specialized instruction and services for disabilities.

Just weeks into her tenure as Assistant Superintendent and Director of the SED, Dr. Alice Parker began to transform the way the division monitors districts and schools. She was motivated by the data that the division had collected on compliance and student outcomes and by an increasing, expressed dissatisfaction from parents, teachers, and administrators throughout the state. Both the data and the informed stakeholders made it clear that critical areas needed improvement. Both begged for a new approach.

### **A new approach**

Dr. Alice Parker initiated a plan to ensure more than just procedural compliance. Determined to focus on positive student results, she wanted all school districts to eventually be evaluated on the basis of student results. In November of 1997, she

## **This Year's Ten KPI Questions**

1. Are a disproportionate number of students placed in special education programs by ethnicity?
2. What is the percentage of fully certified personnel?
3. What percentage of time do students with special needs spend in general education classrooms?
4. Is the percentage of students with disabilities who are expelled or suspended decreasing to parity with students in general education?
5. What is the percentage of students with disabilities participating in the Standardized Testing and Reporting efforts (STAR)?
6. At the fourth, seventh, and tenth grade levels, what are the average literacy scores of students with disabilities, and are those scores improving?
7. What is the average performance on STAR of students with disabilities?
8. What percentage of students with disabilities leave school with a diploma?
9. What percentage of students with disabilities return to general education?
10. What percentage of students with disabilities drop out of special education?

gathered together a group of individuals who had a major investment in the success of students with disabilities. This group of stakeholders, which includes parents, teachers, administrators, individuals with disabilities, advocates, and others in both general and special education, helped Dr. Parker identify from available data ten key performance indicators (KPIs, see left) that reflected student outcomes.

These indicators offer a set of standards that are aligned with the SED's goals (see page 7) and against which gathered data are measured. They help to provide a statistical, objective picture of the degree of success realized by individual school districts as they strive to provide programs and services that ensure procedural safeguards and educational benefits for students with disabilities. This data, collected and analyzed over time, gives parents, teachers, administrators, superintendents, and local school boards an accurate picture of the success of any instructional effort as they work to improve educational outcomes for all children.

### **Test run**

In August 1999, numerous districts volunteered to be part of this new effort—Focused Monitoring—in its transition year. As authorized through the Governor's budget, nineteen districts were selected, with KPIs as the basis for the selection process. Even more importantly, the KPIs were then used by the chosen districts to help evaluate and determine the areas within special education that needed improvement. All nineteen districts had KPI scores that indicated they were in need of support and change in order to produce the best results for students receiving special education services (see article, page 12).

After they were selected, the school districts, with their superintendent and in partnership with the SED, created a leadership team, which began to analyze their challenges and create a plan for implementing improvements, all based on their KPI scores. Making a commitment of several years, and with help from the SED in the way of technical assistance, resources,

*KPIs continued, page 7*



# Practical Assessment in the Classroom

## *Basing Curriculum Decisions on Objective Data*



As you walk into Laura Kahrs-Emigh's ninth-grade classroom, you may find her students graphing. But this isn't a math class; it's an English class. And her students are not graphing the plot fluctuations in Hamlet, but their own academic growth. Ms. Kahrs-Emigh insists that the visual image of the ascending line on a graph is one of the most powerful incentives that her assessment-based curriculum provides for her students—concrete, tangible evidence of what happens when they work hard.

### **A need for objective evidence**

But her commitment to this teaching strategy did not begin simply from her desire to motivate a classroom. It arose from her own need to have objective evidence of what worked for students and what did not.

### **Interpreting numbers**

Laura Kahrs-Emigh began teaching nine years ago as a resource specialist. But this first assignment carried a significant frustration: she was given a great deal of statistical data about students and programs, but she had no training in how to systematically manage and interpret the numbers. However, she marks this frustration as the key motivation to her creating her current convictions.

### **Diagnostic assessment**

Now teaching English at Sheldon High School near Sacramento, Ms. Kahrs-Emigh can't imagine teaching without ongoing, objective assessments of her students' progress. At the beginning of each school year, she spends two weeks gathering statistical data about her students' abilities. She then uses this "diagnostic" assessment to direct her initial instruction.

This approach requires a great deal of flexibility on the part of a teacher. Impressive lesson plans written out in June may not work if students are not

ready for them in September, or if they have progressed beyond the plan's goals. The entire direction of a school year is defined in those first two weeks of assessment. However, Ms. Kahrs-Emigh notes that what provides a framework for her efforts are the standards that her district has been refining for years. Long before the practice became almost a buzz-word, the Elk Grove school district was establishing standards for all of its schools. In support of efforts to encourage its instructors to teach to the standards, the district offers Saturday seminars on how it's done, as well as on how to interpret test scores.

### **Formative assessments**

During the school year, Ms. Kahrs-Emigh administers "formative" assessments, which show the progress that students are making. If the formative assessments don't give her the results she wants or if they don't reflect the minimum desired improve-

ment that her department has defined, she changes her teaching strategies. It is at this point that students start plotting their own progress. Here they begin to get excited about their improvements and see clearly the areas that require from them a greater effort.

### **Summative assessments**

At the end of each year, Ms. Kahrs-Emigh delivers "summative" assessments—evaluations that identify the students' progress through the previous nine months. These final scores serve on three levels: they provide clear indicators of how individual students have progressed; they inform instructors of the relative success or failure of their efforts; and they tell the department or team which teachers are achieving the most favorable results.

### **Sharing ideas**

The scores offer another significant advantage: instructional evaluation

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## *Favorite Assessment Tools*

BY DR. BELINDA KARGE, DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, CSU FULLERTON

Effective reading instruction must be tied closely to classroom assessments. As I train prospective teachers and provide in-service instruction to classroom teachers, I strongly recommend they all maintain some form of running record to document their students' progress. Ideally, data samples should be collected at least three times a year and the results from the inventories then be carefully used to guide instruction. The following assessment inventories are among my favorites.

**Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory** (fourth edition) by James L. Shanker and Eldon E. Ekwall, published by Allyn and Bacon (2000); \$47.95. This inventory is designed to assess the full range of student abilities in the area of reading. It includes 38 different diagnostic tests in eleven different areas that enable the teacher-candidate, classroom teacher, special education teacher, or reading specialist to assess the full range of students' reading abilities. These tests cover the areas of listening comprehension, phonemic awareness, oral and silent reading abilities, concepts about print, letter knowledge, basic sight vocabulary, phonics, structural analysis, context clues, fluency skills, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading interests. This inventory may be used as a quick screening device, for placement of students in groups or classes, for a brief assessment, or for comprehensive individual diagnosis. The instructions for both administering the test and formulating a diagnosis are user-friendly. This book is designed for anyone working in areas of reading problems, reading diagnosis/remediation, and elementary reading methods.

# Accountability in Lemon Grove

## *Efforts Toward Continuous Improvement*

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BY CONNIE FISH, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, INSTRUCTION AND PERSONNEL, LEMON GROVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

rs. Johns, a first-grade teacher in the Lemon Grove Elementary School District, recently shared her experience of a student named Katie. When Katie started school in the fall, she was disruptive in class, reading well below grade level, constantly off task, and unable to focus on her school work. Things have changed considerably for Katie since September. She is now reading at grade level, a pleasure to have in the classroom, and eagerly engaged with her schoolwork. This transformation can be attributed to Mrs. Johns, a highly skilled teacher who knows how to analyze student strengths and weaknesses. She was able to structure Katie's learning to help her become a better student.

### **Support for every student**

Mrs. Johns works in a school district that allocates resources to help every student meet high standards. She is firmly committed to helping all of her students reach their full potential and understands that she must change her approach to teaching if her students fail to achieve. This

willingness to change creates the capacity, vision, and commitment to continuous improvement.

The concept of accountability for the success of all students did not just automatically appear in Lemon Grove. In fact, it came in through the back door. Five years ago, the school board and staff members embarked on an ambitious plan to improve literacy achievement for all students. They wrote a five-year plan to assist students and teachers in this effort. When the State of California established the Public School Accountability Act, Lemon Grove's teachers and administrators identified the necessary parts of an accountable system and realized that, through their effort to build a strong literacy program, they already had many systemic initiatives in place.

### **Plans for accountability**

In September of 1999, the district's governing board adopted an accountability plan that outlines what constitutes accountability in the district; it articulates how all of the initiatives currently in place under-

write authentic accountability; and it identifies the "holes" that still exist in efforts to support all students in meeting high academic standards. The plan is made up of five essential components: foundations for an accountable system, critical aspects of parent involvement, ways of strengthening learning in the classroom, the importance of early identification and intervention, and strategies for holding schools accountable and helping them improve.

### **Foundations**

The California Content Standards for Language Arts and Mathematics constitute the centerpiece of classroom instruction for teachers in Lemon Grove. These standards uphold efforts to develop and implement multiple measures of student performance over time. Using the district's promotion profile, these measures identify students as advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic. They clearly identify students who are at risk of not meeting standards. Knowing the performance of each student is essential to making teachers and schools accountable. This knowledge also allows Lemon Grove instructors to directly address each student's needs. This early prevention and intervention effort, coupled with the efforts of state preschool, Head Start, and preschool special education services, supports a strong literacy foundation in all students.

### **Parent involvement**

Parent support is critical to the success of students. Lemon Grove fosters it district-wide, through daily parenting classes, monthly parenting workshops, classes designed specifically for parents of students found to be at risk of retention, parent-school compacts, and beginning technology courses. This year, Lemon Grove will start training staff to work with parents, with an emphasis on

**Alternative Assessment Techniques for Reading and Writing** by Wilma H. Miller, published by The Center for Applied Research in Education (1995); \$29.95. This book is written to address the informal classroom and home-based assessments that teachers and parents may use. It includes a broad range of checklists and other informal devices to assess competencies in emergent literacy skills; word identification skills; oral, vocabulary, and basic study skills; and silent reading. The final chapter gives additional alternative ways of assessing reading skills and attitudes by using teacher-student reading conferences, inventories to assess prior knowledge, and descriptions of how to use story frames, creative book sharing, and "think aloud."

**English-Español Reading Inventory for the Classroom** by E. Sutton Flynt and Robert B. Cootor, published by Merrill (1999); \$41.55. This excellently written, informal reading inventory is intended for determining Spanish or English reading levels from pre-primer through twelfth grade. The authors combine both traditional and holistic methods to determine a student's reading level. They provide information on reading connected text, story comprehension, word analysis, content comprehension, and miscue analysis. The book offers a full range of passages, including leveled passages in Spanish. It also includes very comprehensive charting and recording grids throughout.

You can order all of these books through your local or virtual bookstore.

*Lemon Grove, continued, page 8*

or need accommodations that are not allowed. It is critical to examine these reasons for what they truly mean. For example, if the test is too hard or frustrating, has the student been prepared for the content of the test? Is the student familiar with the test's format?

If different content is the issue, the next question becomes whether or not the student has been given a chance to learn what is in the general curriculum. If not, why not? What are the goals for the student? If students are planning to graduate with the rest of their class, they should be working on the same material, guided by the same curriculum, and taking the same assessments as the rest of their peers.

The National Center on Education Outcomes has determined that approximately 85 percent of students with disabilities are able to participate in district and state assessments with or without accommodations. The remaining 15 percent will be eligible for alternate assessment and, in California, receive a different type of diploma (for example, a certificate of attendance). In other words, the majority of students with disabilities should be participating in standard assessments.

### **Appropriate accommodations**

An accommodation for a test can be defined as any change in the way that test is administered to provide students with the opportunity to show what they know without the impediment of their disability. Accommodations do not change what the test is trying to measure. For example, if students in a social studies class are expected to give an oral report to demonstrate their knowledge of certain material, students with severe speech impediments could be appropriately accommodated by being allowed to use a computer or slide show to demonstrate their learning.

### **Fairness**

Some people argue that accommodations provide unfair advantages, when in fact they simply provide equal footing. Accommodations are used

appropriately when they are based on need, not benefit. No one would consider wearing eyeglasses as a benefit. Some people need them and some don't. They give no one an unfair advantage in a classroom.

### **Challenging decisions**

The IEP team is charged with determining what accommodations a student needs. However, team members need to understand clearly what each test is measuring if they are to choose appropriate accommodations

that do not invalidate the results. For example, if a test is designed to reflect how fluently José reads, providing him with a reader would not be an appropriate accommodation. But if a test is intended to measure his ability to understand written language and interpret meaning, then a reader is appropriate. Or if a test were designed to evaluate Sally's addition or multiplication skills, a calculator would not be a sensible accommodation. But if the purpose of the test is to discover

*Accountability continued, next column*

## **Alternate Assessment**

*A Quick Overview*

### **What is an alternate assessment?**

Alternate assessment is a substitute way of gathering information on the performance and progress of students who do not participate in the typical state assessments used with the majority of students who attend schools. Typical state assessments involve the use of criterion-referenced assessments, standardized norm-referenced multiple-choice tests (like the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills), performance tests, and sometimes portfolios. Alternate assessments can be the same kinds of assessments (e.g., performance measures or portfolios), but they differ in format, content, or level from the assessments that are used with the majority of students.

### **What does an alternate assessment evaluate?**

The current framework that exists for alternate assessments, developed by the National Center on Educational Outcomes, identifies six areas for alternate assessments to evaluate: academic and functional literacy, physical health, responsibility and independence, citizenship, personal and social well-being, and satisfaction.

### **For whom are alternate assessments designed?**

Students who have significant cognitive disabilities are eligible for alternate assessments. As a rule, these students do not meet the same requirements as those for students who are graduating with a regular high school diploma. Instead, these students are working on life skills curricula. Many of them are preparing for a future that includes supported employment, sheltered workshops, group homes, or supervised independent living arrangements.

### **How does *alternate* assessment differ from *alternative* assessment?**

An alternative assessment is simply a means of assessing what a student has learned in a manner that departs from more traditional approaches, like the multiple-choice test. Forms of alternative assessment include portfolios, dramatic presentations, and various types of exhibits and demonstrations. These assessments, when rigorously aligned with a school's curriculum and academic and performance standards, are appropriate for all students.

### **How does an alternate assessment differ from eligibility assessment?**

The most familiar type of assessment in special education is the one used to determine whether or not a student is eligible for special education services. This form of evaluation serves a purpose entirely different from those assessments that demonstrate the academic success or ranking of a student. Eligibility or identification assessments help to locate those students who need special services.

### **California's guidelines for alternate assessment**

California's guidelines for statewide alternate assessment are available on the Web at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/altassmt.pdf>



## ***Accountability... continued***

how well she understands and applies a theorem, the calculator becomes appropriate.

In general, tests like California's SAT-9 are less friendly toward the use of accommodations. SAT-9 has been standardized using few of the accommodations that the majority of students with disabilities need, like extra time or the use of a marker to track reading. So any use of a non-standard accommodation in California means that the student's test score is thrown out and not counted toward the school's API. While some school districts keep track of the test results of students who use non-standard accommodations, the state department does not. This means that those students' efforts do not appear in statewide data. As a result of this, some IEP teams are encouraged to provide both standard and non-standard accommodations to students with disabilities, thus ensuring that their scores will not be counted and the district's APIs will be higher.

### **Gray area students**

There are some students in the middle. For these "gray area" students, alternate assessment is not appropriate, yet they are not well suited to taking the SAT-9, even with accommodations. They need an alternative approach that allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and skill on the same standards, but using a different format (see sidebar, left). Until alternative assessments can be designed to reflect the same standards assessed by other tests, these students should be provided with appropriate accommodations and included in general assessments—and, of course, counted. We can no longer use a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to any assessment—state, district, or site.

### **Teacher training**

Clearly, staff development issues prevail. It is critical for teachers, administrators, parents, and students to understand the reasons for including children with disabilities in assessments. They also need to know how to go about including all students, how to provide instructional accom-

modations, and then how to make the link between instruction and state and district assessments.

### **Real or rhetorical?**

Including all students in assessments on all levels is no easy task. But if we are truly committed to educating all students, all means all. This does not mean that everyone takes the same test, administered in an identical way. It does mean that all students, including those with disabilities, need to be counted and accounted for in reports on how well our schools are performing. It is our job as educators to be sure that students have full access to the curriculum and ample opportunities to learn it. Essentially, this points to the basic civil rights of all students.

## ***Antelope Valley... continued from page 12***

all of them, including our special needs individuals," Dr. Girolamo affirms. "They now have a clearer understanding of their part in the whole educational system. This is particularly crucial—and especially tough—for high school students to absorb. And it is no less meaningful for teachers to pay attention to all their kids when testing, not just 'the brightest and the best,' if we are to ever achieve improved outcomes and broader access to appropriate programs." He expects that the data he is able to gather and examine during this summer will document Antelope's improving test scores, and adds that pertinent data already reflect better student attendance and reports of fewer student conflicts.

### **More accountability**

Antelope Valley has improved its outcomes during this first year of focused monitoring. "The amount of time, effort, and sheer dedication staff have given to making focused monitoring work is incredible," Dr. Girolamo relates. "I am amazed at the hours spent brainstorming—above and beyond the school day—not to mention some of the great ideas that have been generated. Even before [focused monitoring], we knew we would have to 'up the ante'—do something more, better, or different—to turn things around." Focused monitoring seems to be helping Antelope Valley do just that.

## ***Five Goals That Guide California's SED***

- All individuals' unique instructional needs will be accurately identified.
- All individuals with disabilities will be served or taught by fully qualified personnel.
- All individuals with disabilities will be successfully integrated with their non-disabled peers throughout their educational experience.
- All individuals with disabilities will meet high standards for academic and non-academic skills.
- All individuals with disabilities will successfully participate in preparation for the workplace and independent living.

## ***KPIs... continued from page 3***

leadership, and support, each district started its way down the rewarding road toward improvement.

### **Confident of improvement**

Dr. Parker is confident that, over time, these selected districts—and all districts—will show just how effective schools can become when outcomes are made a significant part of the reporting picture. Dr. Parker, and all staff in the SED under her leadership, will continue their efforts to involve stakeholders in a meaningful way, create partnerships with district leaders who are committed to their efforts in supporting positive student outcomes, and use a system of accountability that is data-informed and results-driven.

## ***Ideas That Work***

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is soliciting input on improving results for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. If you are an individual with a disability, parent, professional educator, member of a national educational or advocacy organization, policymaker, researcher, or other stakeholder concerned with special education issues, then OSEP wants to know your opinions. Information will be used by OSEP to develop a long-range, comprehensive plan for its IDEA Nation Program (Part D of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). The plan will identify national activities for linking best practices to states, school systems, and families to improve results for children and youth with disabilities.

### **How to participate:**

- Visit the OSEP Website to complete the survey online: [www.OSEPplanning.org](http://www.OSEPplanning.org)
- Request a printed survey by calling 800/ 510-1668 (TTY: 800/ 813-5812); by e-mailing [OSEPplanning@westat.com](mailto:OSEPplanning@westat.com); or by writing to Westat, Inc., OSEP Comprehensive Planning Project, 1009 Slater Road, Suite 110, Durham, NC 27703.

recognizing the needs of single and working parents. Additionally, their family literacy program provides weekly home visits, basic adult education, English language instruction, and computer training for parents who lack a high school education or have limited English proficiency.

### **Strength in the classroom**

To ensure the presence of a well-prepared teacher in every classroom—one who is able to assess students and support their efforts—Lemon Grove has an intensive, long-term commitment to professional development that centers on research-based practices in the language arts. It is designed and conducted by instructional leaders. As a result, all teachers are trained in using assessment to drive instruction and working with students who are at risk of failure. Teachers are coached by their peers and offered ongoing opportunities to reflect on and discuss their most pressing concerns.

### **Early identification**

Each year, the district uses a well-developed database of student information to identify students who are most in need of assistance. Moving from this information, the teachers put in place appropriate interventions. The district's greatest success has been in the number of students it has been able to move from Special Day Class into general education. Students have most recently been able to access from home various instructional programs the district makes available on its computer network. This is just one of the many interventions, along with literacy groups, before-and-after-school classes, tutoring, Reading Recovery programs, AVID (see right), and Rolling Readers.

### **Continuous improvement**

In the process of developing a more effective and accountable system, school personnel, district leadership, and governing boards have established open and honest communication and a sense of collective responsibility. This approach focuses on student achievement, with each school implementing

specific strategies for improvement. The emphasis is on continual improvement. As a result, during this 1999–2000 school year, Lemon Grove has been using the *Self-Study Guide for Standards Implementation: San Diego Countywide Plan to Increase Student Academic Achievement*, developed by the San Diego County Office of Education. The guide is helping the district identify the strengths and weaknesses in its accountability system. At both the site and district levels, everyone at Lemon Grove is committed to regularly monitoring their efforts and working collectively to fill in any gaps.

### **Strong leadership**

Lemon Grove's personnel know that systemic improvement depends on strong leadership at all levels—from the classroom to the governing board. Instructional strategies, materials, time, student assessments, budgets, and many other district and school functions need to be scrutinized yearly. Only then will schools be

able “to ensure children's literacy by developing fluent readers, writers, and communicators,” as expressed in the first goal of their governing board.

### **Long-term commitments**

This is not a quick fix. It means a long-term commitment to building a learning community among everyone who has an investment in the effort: superintendents, teachers, parents, students, and others. It also requires absolute willingness to stay the course and remain focused over time. The Lemon Grove School District is living its commitment to accountability, as well as to literacy. The compelling evidence that the district is realizing its goal is provided by the students: they clearly and regularly demonstrate continuous improvement.

### **Guides for improvement**

The *Self-Study Guide for Standards Implementation* is available for purchase through the San Diego County Office of Education. For information, call Diane Delaney at 858/ 292-3530.

## ***Lemon Grove's Continuous Improvement***

### ***A Sampler of Programs***

#### **Parent/School Compacts**

A requirement of Title I, Parent/School Compacts explicitly outline the teacher's and the parent's obligation in helping students improve. Each school that uses Title I money is required to develop these compacts and have the parents and staff of Title I students sign an agreement to do their part in supporting the child. The Website, [www.ed.gov/pubs/CompactforReading/](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/CompactforReading/), provides more information on this activity, which is part of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.

#### **AVID (Achievement Via Individual Achievement)**

An international program, AVID targets underrepresented middle and high school students who typically would not go to college. The mission of AVID is to ensure that all students, especially those underachieving students in middle schools who are capable of completing a college preparatory path, will succeed in the most rigorous curriculum; will enter mainstream activities of the school; will increase their enrollment in four-year colleges; and will become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society. The purpose of the AVID program is to restructure the teaching methods of an entire school and to open access to the curricula that will ensure four-year college eligibility to almost all students. Visit the Website <http://www.avidcenter.org/> to learn more.

#### **Rolling Readers USA**

A national organization that created one of the first volunteer tutoring programs to support the efforts to get every child reading by the end of third grade, Rolling Readers finds regular community members to volunteer weekly to read with students. It provides training books and guides. Learn more about the organization at <http://www.rollingreaders.org/>.



# FAMILIES IN ACTION: THE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

BY JOAN KILBURN, PARENT COORDINATOR

Helping parents to “find their own voice and use it,” the Family Partnership Project has sponsored three Family Forums this spring in an effort to do just that. The forums, designed for parents of students with disabilities, provided these parents with a chance to make recommendations on how to support and improve their efforts to work with professionals.

Designed by CalSTAT (California Services for Technical Assistance and Training), the forums took place in the southern, central, and northern regions of California. Sixty diverse individuals were brought together in each region to examine four key topics: parent and professional collaboration, mutual support, information sharing, and integrated trainings—all on state, regional, and local levels. The forums also addressed the critical question of how to involve underrepresented and disenfranchised families in these activities.

In addition to the forums, parents throughout the state have been attending leadership trainings conducted by parent organizations and funded by the CalSTAT Family Participation Project.

## Parents as best advocates

The mother of a seventeen-year-old boy with severe Down Syndrome, Vida Luz Tuckler firmly believes that “no one knows a child’s special needs better than the parent.” Vida had participated in parent leadership training activities at the SEA (Support, Education, and Advocacy) Center, a PTI (Parent Training and Information Center) that serves Northern California. Also serving as a mentor parent, Vida would like to see the energy from the forums and trainings spill outside of the conference rooms into classrooms, administrators’ offices, and legislative assembly halls.

Vida did not always speak with the confidence and determination she knows today. After the birth of her son, Emmanuel Zamora, she refused the aid of other parents in similar situations. But once she faced and understood her child’s disability, she armed herself with

as much information as she could to help him. She now realizes that the encouragement of her early mentors catalyzed her own development.

While having had her share of frustrations, Vida has also known success. As a result of her persistent recommendations, Emmanuel’s school recently (and substantially) increased his weekly speech therapy. She maintains, “There are no limits when parents advocate strongly. Behind every ‘no’ there’s usually a ‘yes.’”

## “Heart” transplant

According to Leticia Ruiz, “It’s easy to get ‘stuck’ as a parent, educator, or principal on the real problems that face special education—lack of funding and shortages in staff. Sometimes we need a change of heart—a ‘heart’ transplant—to help us refocus on the best interests of our children.”

## Parent Participation Fund

**WHAT:** Money available for transportation, childcare, and related expenses.

**FOR WHOM:** Parents, especially those traditionally underserved or isolated.

**WHY:** To allow parents to participate in state and regional decision-making bodies (e.g., boards, commissions, legislative bodies, etc.).

**WHEN:** Now.

**WHERE:** Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) are providing these stipends. To find the PTI in your region, visit the Website <http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/ptirc.htm> or call Procedural Safeguards and Referral Services at 800/926-0648.

A parent facilitator for eleven years with San Diego City Schools and a participant at the southern Family Forum, Leticia was never without hope, even when her son, Beto, now fourteen, was handed a fifty-fifty chance of survival at birth. Born prematurely with complications that led to cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and epilepsy, Beto not only defied the odds but also the predictions that, if he managed to live at all, he would be a “vegetable.” Leticia has also had to advocate vigorously for many of Beto’s special services, including

speech, physical, and occupational therapy. “I don’t like to use the word ‘fight,’ but I’ve had to negotiate for what I know Beto needs.”

Leticia’s workgroup at the southern Family Forum addressed the topic of mutual support. She was inspired by the participants’ spirit of “agreeing to disagree,” especially given their cultural differences. Leticia expects these statewide forums to enhance sensitivity to diverse cultures and to increase involvement of parents and outreach to parents.

## Parents are empowered

The Family Forums culminated in a statewide symposium in Sacramento on June 28 and 29, 2000. On the first day, 24 individuals selected from the three regional forums convened to synthesize the groups’ findings and chose five recommendations critical to the forums’ primary topics. The next day, educators in general and special education and leaders from community agencies that address the needs of special education joined them, invited by local groups such as PTIs and Family Resource Centers, and by the Special Education Division (SED) of the California Department of Education. Acknowledged experts in their fields, these representatives heard the proposed recommendations made by family members and offered suggestions for translating these recommendations (see letter, page 2) into action.

## Walking the talk

The recommendations from the Family Forum have been submitted to the SED and will be presented to the Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE), as well as to such bodies as Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) and the Special Education Local Plan Areas’ (SELPAs) governing councils. Together, the recommendations and action steps developed at the symposium will constitute a comprehensive plan of action to support family partnerships and advance special education reform. The ultimate goal is to improve education for all children in California.

# LEGISLATION

Including students with disabilities in public school assessment programs may soon become California law. **Assembly Bill 1940** was introduced on February 15, 2000, by California State Assembly member Lou Papan (Democrat, 19th District) and unanimously passed by the Assembly Education Committee. After amendments were made to ensure that it was not redundant with existing legislation and that it conformed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97), it was again unanimously passed on June 21. It is now pending before the full Senate.

If this bill passes, the Superintendent of Public Instruction must develop, and the State Board of Education adopt, performance goals and indicators for students with special needs. These goals need to be consistent with, and aligned to, the content and performance standards that exist for general education students; and they must include proficiency in the general curriculum and preparation for employment and independent living.

Assembly Bill 1940 would also require that the California Department of Education provide data to the public on the number of students with special needs who are participating in assessments, the kinds of assessments, and how well the students perform. For a full text of the bill, go to California's legislative Website, <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/>, and click on "Bill Information."

## Federal Legislation

In the United States Congress, a House-Senate appropriations conference committee has agreed to an increase of approximately \$1.3 billion for IDEA state grants for the federal fiscal year 2001. The conference committee agreed with the Senate level of funding for special education state grants: \$6,279,685,000. The House had earlier approved only a \$500 million increase. When House and Senate members return from their August recess, they will vote on the education appropriations bill.

## Students... continued from page 16

Diagnosed with bilateral neural hearing loss at the age of three, and less fluent in signing than some others with hearing disabilities, Shawn relies heavily on computerized notes to fill him in. A captionist accompanies him to nearly all of his classes, recording the lecture notes for his later reference.

## Confident despite disability

Shawn's nine years in speech therapy were fundamental to helping him confront his own special needs without embarrassment. He remembers spending the third grade in an all-deaf classroom until the teacher realized he was well beyond that particular academic level.

Then he was mainstreamed into hearing classes. "At the beginning, this was hard for me, because all of my friends were in deaf classes. After a while, I began to make new friends, and took on some of the other adjustments as challenges," Shawn recounts.

In junior high school, he found himself the only deaf student in the entire student body. He brought along an interpreter who had helped him throughout elementary school, but he also persisted in asking to be placed at the front of the classroom. And he never hesitated to ask for information to be repeated for his benefit. By the time he reached high school, Shawn needed an interpreter and a special needs environment significantly less than before. He easily juggled academic excellence with a position on the yearbook staff and the varsity wrestling team; he also earned a black belt in martial arts and was active in the drama department. "High school exposed me to a lot of new people and varied experiences," he summarizes.

## Speaking out

Shawn feels honored to serve on the Commission, and was eager to speak out from his very first meeting.



*Shawn Mohamed, Student Representative  
for the Advisory Commission on  
Special Education*

He does not doubt the Commission's willingness to listen and to implement changes, but is quick to point out that, in most cases, members haven't, themselves, struggled against some of the shortcomings of the special needs delivery system. "The student representatives know from the 'inside' how things are and how they work. They tell it like it is," Shawn states candidly. He is proud, too, to have helped reeducate those who automatically assume someone with a disability is mentally challenged.

## The system works

While acknowledging that much remains to be done to facilitate the delivery of services for students with

special needs, Shawn believes that the system can and does work. He feels fortunate to have been influenced by several teachers who were strong advocates for his success. One in particular, his high school special education teacher Alicia Handlon, "was always looking out for me, saw to it that my IEPs were in-depth and up-to-date, and also made sure our school's two interpreters went where [they were] most needed."

## Legislation

Service on the Commission has made Shawn and Danielle acutely aware of how legislation shapes and informs the way people understand the needs of individuals with disabilities. "Before my term, I never realized how many bills are presented by the ACSE to the state government—bills that will profit all kids, not only those in special education," Shawn remarks. According to these students, the Commission is working hard to enact and implement legislation that could dramatically improve the quality of learning for all of California's students. A committed assembly for education reform, the ACSE warmly welcomes and values the contributions of its student members.

## Improving Training Programs for Teachers

The State Improvement Grant (SIG), through the California Department of Education's Special Education Division, is making it easier for teachers to earn their special education credential. The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) awarded this grant to California, making available \$9,230,000 to improve special education in the state over a five-year period. The Partnership Committee on Special Education (PCSE), a representative group of stakeholders made up of parents, educators, and interested community members from around the state, has been serving as an advisory council for the goals of the grant and for the way its money is being spent. As a result, some SIG dollars are being used to begin reducing the number of special education teachers who are less than fully qualified—those with emergency credentials or with credential waivers. The PCSE has outlined two directions for this effort during the first year of the grant's implementation.

### Fully qualifying teachers

The PCSE has recommended that a portion of the SIG money be used to reduce the number of special education teachers with less than a full, clear credential. Four pre-intern (beginning teacher training) programs that advance these goals were awarded \$46,000 this spring to assist them in their efforts to make it more possible for teachers to complete their necessary course work toward a special education credential. The following organizations' pre-intern programs were awarded the SIG dollars:

- Orange County Department of Education's Institute for Teaching Excellence
- Ventura County Consortium
- Kings County Office of Education
- San Francisco Unified School District

These programs were chosen for several reasons: they serve broad, geographical areas; their courses are easily accessible and interactive on the Internet; their programs had a history of success; and they regularly serve under-represented teacher candidates who possess limited resources.

These innovative programs offer a number of on-line benefits: easy accessibility to courses that provide classroom survival skills to new teachers and opportunities for on-line discussion forums that allow students and teachers to share their ideas from home.

The courses offered through these pre-intern programs contain invaluable information about special education instruction. An additional feature of this grant involves plans to make that

information available to all special education teachers throughout the state, regardless of affiliation and at no cost.

### Making courses available

Many special education credentialing programs are often crowded and difficult to access. The PCSE has proposed that the state create an incentive program that makes it financially possible for select schools to provide additional, easily accessible courses that fulfill special education requirements. The incentive also encourages these schools to train teachers in strategies for classroom collaboration.

Two qualified institutions have been awarded a total of \$40,000 to support additional special education courses. As part of the condition of receiving this money, the schools have agreed to make these extra courses available for two years. Slated to receive these State Improvement Grant dollars are California State University at Fresno's School of Education and Human Development and California State University at Fullerton's School of Human Development and Community Service Education Division. The special and general education faculty at these schools have a history of collaborating. For years they have been working together to train teachers and support efforts to provide quality education for all children.

The State Improvement Grant appears to be well named: things are improving during this first year. To find out more about the SIG and the Partnership Committee on Special Education, visit the Website listed to the right.

## Grant Goals and Objectives

The ultimate goal of the State Improvement Grant (SIG) is to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Specific, measurable objectives that serve this goal make it possible to evaluate how well the activities of the grant are progressing. These objectives target students, teachers, and the education system.

**Students:** The SIG is designed to increase the number of children with disabilities who take and do well on the STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) test; to improve the success rate of these children in how much they learn in school and in how well they do after they finish their formal education; to insure that parents are satisfied with the help their children receive in transitional times, between preschool and first grade, for example, or between high school and college or employment; and to decrease the number of students with special needs who are expelled or suspended.

**Teachers:** Support for teachers in special education is a key component of the grant as well. The SIG is helping to reduce the number of teachers who are employed under emergency permits and waivers and increase the number of teachers fully credentialed in special education. Additionally, it is seeking to promote the use of research-based strategies in the classroom, particularly in the areas of literacy and positive behavior supports.

**The education system:** Finally, the SIG is devising strategies to ensure that funding for special education is cost effective but not dependent upon the placement of children in special education programs; and to increase both the amount of time that students with special needs spend in the general education classroom and the involvement of consumers and parents in planning, implementing, and evaluating reform efforts in education.

For more information on the SIG, visit its Website: <http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/calstat/pcseshg.html#SIG>.



# A Fresh Focus on Improved Outcomes

## *School District Benefits from Focused Monitoring*



Accountability and its impact on improved outcomes for individuals with disabilities has become perhaps the single most pressing concern for the Special Education Division (SED) of the California Department of Education (CDE). The SED has instituted a program of focused monitoring, part of the larger Quality Assurance Process (QAP), in efforts to link accountability with high standards for all students. This data-informed system of review is working to put in place a system of evaluation that rates a school district's performance and outcomes on the basis of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that support the SED's goals (see article, page 3). The results of this review represent one measure of a district's success. They also help to determine the kind of guidance the SED provides to improve district outcomes.

### **Facilitated districts**

Antelope Valley Unified School District is actively involved in the focused monitoring effort. Its low data scores have helped to identify it as one of the districts in need of guidance and support. Superintendent Dr. Robert Girolamo and his colleagues were immediately willing to be part of the process, recognizing focused monitoring as an ideal vehicle for improvement.

### **Teacher shortages and more**

A school administrator since 1969, Dr. Girolamo is candid about the problems his district experienced before focused monitoring. A 25 percent growth spurt over the past five years had not only enlarged the overall student population to 18,500, but had also produced an 80 percent increase in the number of students with special needs. An ongoing shortage of credentialed teachers and mounting incidents of frustrated parents engaged in fair hearings only exacerbated the situa-

tion. Dr. Girolamo admits, "We concluded that Antelope Valley required significant improvement, especially where full access to programs for our students with disabilities did not exist. We realized these needs even before the advent of focused monitoring. But, we asked ourselves, how do we actually go about providing full inclusion and access to every program, rather than 'warehousing'? [There were too many times when] I

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***"We knew we would  
have to 'up the  
ante'—do something  
more, better, or  
different—to turn  
things around."***

***— Dr. Robert Girolamo,  
Superintendent, Antelope Valley  
Unified School District***

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visited special population classrooms and found adult-centered, not child-centered, classroom activities. It seemed the goal of the class was to keep the students seated, quiet, and have them do the provided worksheet. Hardly an experience that has real-world application."

### **Substantial benefits**

Dr. Girolamo believes that focused monitoring has been instrumental in helping the district move toward greater accountability and positive outcomes. As a result of the SED's efforts and support, all of Antelope's administrators have received training in how to better serve its students, particularly those with disabilities. Antelope Valley's Focused Monitoring Committee meets regularly to deter-

mine how special services might be delivered more effectively. "While not all the school sites are 'there' yet, the warehouse stereotype is changing, slowly but surely," Dr. Girolamo maintains.

### **Awareness of issues**

Finding qualified staff to meet Antelope Valley's special education needs is a big challenge. In the face of a very real shortage of credentialed teachers, the district is supporting non-credentialed staff by providing them with additional resource personnel. This, Dr. Girolamo asserts, would not be happening were it not for focused monitoring, which is the source for part of the money that funds these personnel.

Antelope Valley is soon to absorb 260 of Los Angeles County's severely disabled and emotionally disturbed youngsters. This addition will require the district to even further augment its support staff. "Awareness of issues is nearly as significant as the changes you wish to implement," he observes. Many teachers in the district are translating this awareness into action by completing their full teaching credential in an enthusiastic response to this first year of focused monitoring. With marked improvement in both additional resource personnel and credentialed teachers, the district has witnessed a proportionate decrease in the number of fair hearings being initiated over the last months.

### **The importance of testing**

Dr. Girolamo is the first to admit that Antelope Valley's student test scores had been floundering. With the advent of focused monitoring, every school in the district can now claim a renewed appreciation of the importance of testing and the elements that contribute to successful test taking and test administering. "We have impressed our students with the seriousness of testing and of its impact [on]

*Antelope Valley continued, page 7*

## ***Classroom...*** continued from page 4

and incentives for sharing strategies, which Ms. Kahrs-Emigh insists have greatly enriched the program at Sheldon. "Teachers are regularly talking and exchanging the best parts of what they do," she observes. The eventual result is that the entire department begins using teaching techniques that are proven.

It's not as though English teachers haven't been assessing their students since the invention of the comparison-and-contrast essay. But this is assessment with a difference: the gathered data is objective and numerical.

### **Data provides confidence**

This approach could be viewed as threatening. Ms. Kahrs-Emigh sees it only as liberating. While she acknowledges that assessment efforts make the beginning of the year particularly intense, she insists that the gathered data allow her to move through the

rest of the year with confidence. She is certain that she is addressing those areas where her students need the most work. "This form of data-informed assessment takes out the guesswork," she posits. "I love that. Having clear standards makes a big difference, too. I can point to the goal and the benchmark; and then I work to reach the goal from the students' current level of achievement."

### **Teachers supporting teachers**

However, it wasn't until she went back to school to get her Master's degree in education that she had access to course work in statistical assessment. But many of the other teachers at Sheldon High School also have Master's degrees, with the consequent training in assessment, creating an atmosphere of enthusiasm for the approach. Her department pays a great deal of attention to the topic, and the teachers who "aren't there yet" are being gradually brought along.

## **School resources**

Learning how to base classroom activities on objective data is not easy to learn or simple to implement. Ms. Kahrs-Emigh advises parents and educators who are interested in this approach to talk to reading specialists about assessment-based instruction. These are often the professionals who guide staff development for a school's language arts programs. Special education teachers are also usually very knowledgeable about assessment and can support teachers in its use across the curriculum.

Ms. Kahrs-Emigh expresses gratitude to the Elk Grove district for supporting assessment and accountability efforts on all levels. Administrators and staff define clear standards and benchmarks; they encourage data-informed decision-making in the classroom. At this point in her career, Laura Kahrs-Emigh can't imagine teaching without it.

## ***Assessment That Drives Instruction***

BY COLLEEN SHEA STUMP, PH.D., DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

Everyday events in a classroom determine the success or failure of both teachers and students. And while it is important that schools document the achievement of their students through state, district, and national testing, as well as through regular classroom evaluations, these kinds of assessments do little to help teachers make decisions about how to construct their daily efforts. Knowing that a student scored below the twenty-fifth percentile on a standardized test provides some information concerning the student's performance, but gives little, if any, guidance in what needs to or could be done in the classroom to support student growth and development.

Standardized tests, by design, are summative, rather than formative: they summarize what students have learned as a result of instruction. For example, after teaching a unit on cell structure, in a summative assessment,

a teacher administers a quiz. Some students will demonstrate high levels of performance and other students will fail. At that point, the teacher becomes aware that the instruction/curriculum was not successful for all, but it is often too late in the academic calendar to make adaptations to reach the students who "aren't getting it."

In contrast, formative assessment *informs* instruction: it is ongoing and assesses student performance in the curriculum as it is being taught. Using formative assessment, the teacher schedules various kinds of evaluation throughout the instruction. A unit may begin with a pretest and continue with the teacher administering daily or weekly quizzes to check for student understanding. She may also have students complete "quick writes" at the end of each class, indicating what they have learned or what questions they still have about the material. Students may be

organized into pairs or small groups and asked to respond to questions; or they may engage in tasks that demonstrate their understanding of content on a daily or weekly basis.

If the students are successful, instruction continues; if students are experiencing difficulty, the teacher introduces re-teaching, review, and reinforcement activities. Throughout the unit, the teacher is "tuned in" to student understanding, constantly adjusting the curriculum and various teaching practices to insure learning.

Formative assessment helps to remove much of the stress and blame attached to summative efforts when students don't do well. This more diagnostic form of evaluation provides teachers with specific information about student performance. Rather than operating from a "hunch" that students are learning, teachers can take the clear, hard data that formative assessment provides and know how well students are grasping key concepts and skills—as they are being taught. Formative assessment helps to remove the guesswork.

## RiSE LIBRARY RESOURCES

The Resources in Special Education (RiSE) Library is located at Parents Helping Parents (PHP) in Santa Clara, California. Phone: 408/ 727-5775, ext. 110. What follows is a partial list of its available holdings on **accountability**. Contact the library for a complete list.

**Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution** by the Commission on the Restructuring of the American High School. National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP): Reston, VA, 1996; call #20433; 114 pp. Offers recommendations from a study done by the NASSP Commission and the Carnegie Institute on the reform of high schools. Includes chapters on curriculum, instructional strategies, technology, assessment, accountability, restructuring, staff development, and transition.

**Creating Schools for All Our Students: What 12 Schools Have To Say** by K. Chenoweth, et al. Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): Reston, VA, 1994; call #21210; 74 pp. Presents the planning and implementation methods of twelve inclusive schools. Describes features of leadership, standards, collaboration and cooperation, parental partnerships, research strategies, accountability, and much more.

**Dollars and Sense: A Simple Approach to School Finance** by R. Terzian, et al. Milton Marks: Sacramento, CA, July 1997; call #20773; 121 pp. Focuses on topics such as equity of educational opportunity, state versus local control, base and categorical funding, and special education. Findings include simplifying the system, redirecting accountability, and funding adequately.

**Educating One and All: Students with Disabilities and Standards-Based Reform** by L.M. McDonnell, ed. National Academy Press: Washington, D.C., 1997; call #21360; 303 pp. Focuses on the inclusion of children with disabilities in school reforms. Analyzes the issues involved in increasing the participation of students with disabilities in assessments and accountability systems.

**Focusing Assessments on Teaching and Learning** by Walt Haney. *New Schools, New Communities*, 1996: Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 11-20; call #21007. Discusses the ascribed purposes of tests: assuring accountability, providing information to help teachers improve instruction, and helping students learn. Proposes forms of assessment that permit the use of a wider range of assessment techniques.

**Implementation of Alternative Methods for Making Educational Accountability Decisions for Students with Disabilities** by James E. Ysseldyke. National Center on Educational Outcomes: Minneapolis, MN, 1994; call # 7659; 26 pp. Presents the issues and challenges involved in gathering data for purposes of making decisions about accountability. Discusses alternative methods of assessment and the key issues and barriers around this effort.

**Special Education in an Era of School Reform: Accountability, Standards, and Assessment** by Ronald Erickson. Federal Resource Center: Washington, DC, 1998; call #21374; 37 pp. Discusses some of the critical questions being asked by educators in the areas of results-based accountability systems, standards, and assessment systems, including accommodations.

## NEW!! ON-LINE LIBRARY

The RiSE Library is now available on-line. Visit the Website for Parents Helping Parents, <http://www.php.com>, and follow the link that reads "The RiSE (Resources in Special Education) Library." There you can search all of the library's available resources and even order on-line.

## ON-LINE RESOURCES

<http://www.ucop.edu/csmp/crlp/>  
**The California Reading and Literature Project** home page provides resources that support all teachers through professional development and leadership. Its purpose is to help improve instruction in reading and literature.

<http://www.testdoctor.com/>  
**The Center for Performance Assessment** is a private educational organization designed to help individuals, school districts, and corporations achieve their educational objectives through assessment,

accountability, and standards. Its Website offers a calendar of workshops and summer institutes, ordering information for print resources, answers to frequently asked questions, and more.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/csmt/>  
**The Clearinghouse for Specialized Media & Technology (CSMT)**, a Website for the unit of the State Special Schools and Services Division, produces accessible versions of textbooks, workbooks, and literature books adopted for all public schools by the State Board of Education.

<http://www.cec.sped.org/>  
**The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** makes available information on partnerships and provides access to publications and products, career connections, a calendar of trainings and events, a link to the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (which offers the ERIC/AE Full Text Internet Library of articles about tests, testing, evaluation, and more), and information on CEC memberships.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/fmtacnt.htm>

The California Department of Education provides a site with information on **Focused Monitoring and Technical Assistance and Procedural Safeguards and Referral Services**. Focused Monitoring maps and contacts by county and by SELPA (Special Education Local Plan Area) are also available.

<http://www.ncpa.org/pi/edu/edu6.html>  
**Idea House for the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA)** offers links to a variety of pages that focus on school performance and accountability. NCPA addresses the issue of performance for schools, teachers, and all students, as well as information on the effects of increased funding, class and school size, SAT and other testing, and more.

<http://www.coled.umn.edu/NCEO/>  
**The National Center on Educational Outcomes** provides national leadership in the participation of students with disabilities and with limited English proficiency in national and state assessments, standards-setting efforts, and graduation requirements. Their site offers technical assistance, an information exchange, and publications and reports on general and alternate assessment.

*On-line Resources continued, next page*



## C

## A L E N D A R

September 14-15

**CRESST Annual Conference** (National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing). For researchers and school accountability representatives. Topics include special education assessment and issues related to testing: accountability, validity, and more. Los Angeles, CA (UCLA campus). Contact: Kim Hurst, 310/ 794-9140; e-mail: kim@cse.ucla.edu; Website: <http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/index.htm>

September 18-20

**Improving America's Schools Conference** (Western Region). Sponsored by the United States Department of Education. For parents, teachers, principals, state and local education officials, and others. Addresses comprehensive education reform. Topics include how to coordinate and integrate Federal programs; how to implement reform; how to access the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance network; and more. Deadline: August 15. Sacramento, CA. Contact: 800/ 203-5494; Website: <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences>

October 5-6

**Supported Life 2000: Inclusive Communities—The Journey of Dreams**  
A conference for professionals, educators, families, and individuals with disabilities. Topics include the current state and future of inclusion for people with disabilities. Sacramento, CA. Contact: Andy Faletti, 916/ 263-1153; e-mail: SLI@supportedlife.org

October 25-28

**Charting a New Course—Taking Reform into the New Millennium.**  
The California State Federation of the Council for Exceptional Children's 50th annual meeting and special education showcase. For all educators, parents, administrators, students and professionals interested in special education reform. Sacramento, CA. Contact: Details/Details, 916/443-3855; e-mail: [marion@details2.com](mailto:marion@details2.com)

November 2-4

**Council for Educational Diagnostic Services Annual Topical Conference.**  
For administrators, directors, principals, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and teachers. Topics include educational assessment, exceptional persons, psychology, special education, and testing. San Diego, CA. Contact: Rachelle Bruno, 606/ 572-5167; e-mail: bruno@nku.edu

On-line Resources... continued<http://www.naschools.org/>

The New American Schools Website offers a set of connections to new, research-based designs that focus on changing America's classrooms, schools, and school systems to ensure improved outcomes for the nation's students.

<http://www.pai-ca.org/pubs/401601.htm>

Protection & Advocacy, Inc., offers many publications, in particular, **18 Tips For Getting Quality Special Education Services For Your Child**. The organization encourages visitors to download and copy these materials for personal use.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa/>

The California Department of Education (CDE) features a **Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999** page, with links to a variety of sources: the Academic Performance Index (API), the Immediate Intervention and Underperforming Schools Program, the Governor's High Achieving/Improving Schools Program, and more.

<http://cresst96.cse.ucla.edu/index.htm>

The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) offers research and information on topics related to K-12 educational testing and accountability.

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/SAI/>  
The National Institute on Student

**Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment** is a coordinated and comprehensive program of research and development. On-line, the Institute provides research-based leadership for improving student achievement in core content areas and works to integrate these areas to enhance student learning.

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov>

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development makes available the *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*, including an article on the best way to teach this skill to children.

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/>

The U.S. Department of Education provides information on its efforts to evaluate federal education programs, with numerous links to programs ranging from preschool to college. It also offers abstracts, highlights, and full reports from evaluation projects, as well as information on practices and methodologies in education evaluation. Survey instruments are also available here.

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/IASA/newsletters/>

This U.S. Department of Education site offers a series of newsletters that provide information on improving America's schools. Its audience is leaders who work at the school, district, and state level.

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# Students Offer Valuable Insight

## *Advisory Commission on Special Education Welcomes Youth*

**S**tudents with special needs are making their voices heard, and not just in the classroom. Schools and other organizations are increasingly aware of the invaluable input of those who are at the receiving end of special education services—the students themselves. The Advisory Commission on Special Education (ACSE), made up of appointed educators, legislators, and other interested advocates who meet eight times a year to discuss issues that are critical to students with disabilities, has demonstrated its belief in the importance of students' voices. Among its members are two students who are not at all reticent to air their experiences in California's schools.

### **Formative years**

Danielle Morin, a freshman at Santa Ana College, was diagnosed with leukemia as a child. Treated for a resulting soft tumor behind her left eye with full-face radiation and chemotherapy, she was left with only partial vision in that eye. She received significant help in school, but Danielle found it difficult to keep up with the rest of her classmates. She was then diagnosed as having a learning disability.

### **Help from a mentor**

During her years at Garden Grove High School, Danielle truly began to thrive academically and realize her potential as a student leader. School personnel provided accommodations that supported her test-taking when her visual impairment would have otherwise impeded her progress. They also modified her assignments so that she did not fall behind. She recounts one very memorable resource teacher, Jason Lupei, "who would work with me before school, after school, and even gave up lunch periods. He always wanted the best for his students."

At Garden Grove, students vie for the coveted title of "most worthy Argonaut" (the name of the school's mascot), awarded to that student with an overall profile of excellence. When Danielle discovered that the special education population was not considered for this award, Mr. Lupei supported her concerns and took steps to successfully put them in the running. "That inspired me to explore ways I could get more involved with making things better for kids like myself," Danielle affirms.

### **Getting on the Commission**

One of those "ways" has been her active participation in ACSE. Becoming a student member was no "shoo-in." Danielle competed against 500 other high school juniors and seniors with disabilities in a state-

wide Youth Leadership Forum. She was required to write three separate essays, fill out various applications, and secure several letters of recommendation on her behalf. Sixty individuals are selected from that resource pool to attend a week-long conference in Sacramento, from which only six are ultimately chosen. After going before the Commission and undergoing telephone interviews, Danielle was one of three students to make the final cut.

### **An active advocate**

Danielle works part time when she is not attending school. She also volunteers several hours a week in recreation therapy at a local hospital. She's not exactly sure where her career path will take her, but she is certain it will involve helping individuals with disabilities. As an ACSE member, she has advocated strongly for fuller special needs accommo-

dations on college campuses. She would also like to see more transition counseling in high schools for special needs students. "I really didn't know what to expect when I got to college," she admits. "I was pretty clueless."

Danielle recently attended the Leadership Conference for Youth with Disabilities in Washington, D.C. Aside from providing a better understanding of government and political frameworks, the conference also promoted the advancement of disability leadership in local communities, and it explored employment resources.

### **Neck and neck**

When the ACSE could not decide between Danielle and Shawn Mohamed, two ideal candidates for student membership, it gladly accepted them both. Like Danielle, Shawn began his two-year term on the commission in September, 1999. He is a freshman at California State University, San Bernardino, who anticipates a career in corporate law.

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